Famous Artists Course

Famous Artists Schools, Inc., Westport, Connecticut

Creating variety in forms, textures and surfaces

Lesson 9

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Fred Ludekens

Norman Rockwell

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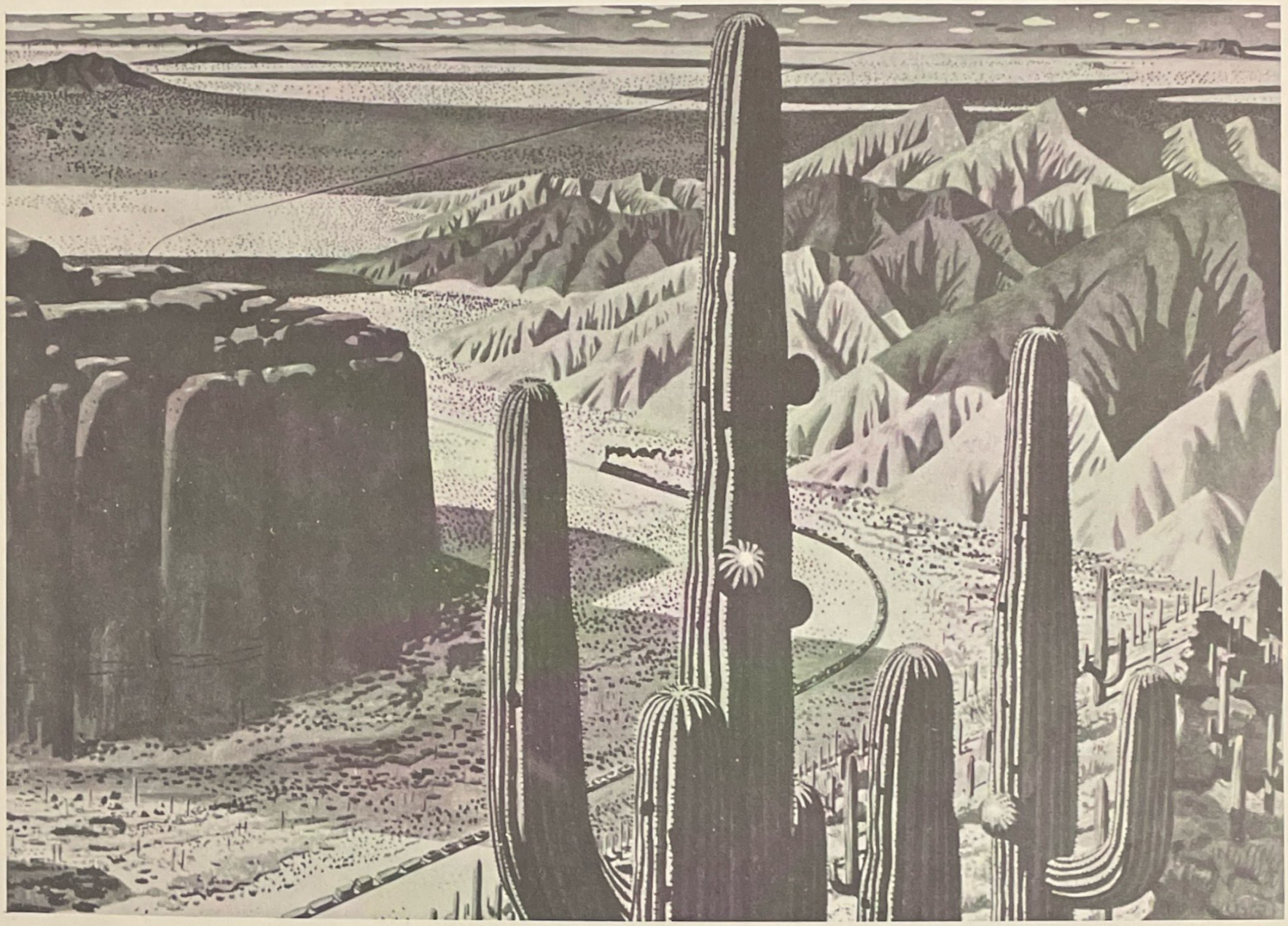

This western landscape by Fred Ludekens demonstrates the main points we will make in this lesson. Although there are many similar objects in the picture, no two are exactly alike. Ludekens knew that interest would hinge on the variety of sizes and shapes of the cacti, hills, and cliffs. His hills are specific hills — a type found in the West — and his cacti and cliffs are also specific. Ludekens is as aware of texture as he is of form. The irregular vertical flutings of the cactus help to identify it quickly and clearly. The dark, smooth-faced cliffs on the left contrast with the rougher hills at the right and the scrub-dotted desert between.

Creating variety in forms, textures and surfaces

We live in a world filled with a fascinating variety of forms, textures, and surfaces. The stark metallic skeleton of a skyscraper under construction, the busy, intricate pattern of leafless branches against a smooth expanse of snow, the coarse tweed of a man's suit next to the shining silk of a woman's dress, the sleek, wet bodies of children scampering over the rough, rocky walls of a swimming hole — there is an excitement, a vivid poetry of the senses in these and other forms and textures. If we have the eyes to see them, they give color and richness to our lives.

They will do as much for our pictures. A good picture is like a living experience, the artist's mood and perceptions made real for the viewer. Few things do more than descriptive form and texture to make the viewer see what we have seen. A picture may be finely conceived, well composed, and solidly constructed, but it is not a fulfilled picture until the details of form and texture have been added. Even the simplest outline drawing has its textures. They are expressed in the outline — in the soft stroke of varied weight that suggests cloth, the firm, rigid line that describes a hard surface.

Feel it and paint it

The real artist experiences his subject intensely. Our goal is to re-create in our picture the transparency of glass, the softness of fur, the hardness of metal, the filminess of a cloud. To succeed, we must "feel" the special qualities of these materials and what makes one different from the other. When we paint the pavement of a street, a sandy beach, or a grassy lawn, we should think how each of these would feel if we were walking across it. By imagining the physical sensation of actual contact, we can better express the real character of our subject. We must "feel" its form and surface if we are to paint it with conviction.

The act of applying the various textures to the forms in a picture is in itself a source of rich pleasure to the artist. Now is the time to be absorbed in creative play with the brush, the pen, or pencil: to build up a rocky texture with scumbled tones of thick opaque, to chase a wash speedily across the paper surface and suggest a sky, to place curling stroke beside curling stroke and see a delicate, lovely head of hair come into being. For many artists this is one of the happiest parts of picture making.

Texture can suggest mood

Although textures are exciting to draw and paint and help re-create the appearance of things, they have a deeper value. Sensitively interpreted, they can support or suggest a mood. By playing down our textures and making quiet, smooth surfaces predominate in a picture, we can give the viewer a feeling of calm and peace. A picture filled with busy, active textures is a picture filled with excitement and drama. If we use these textures thoughtfully we can influence the viewer's sensations as effectively as we do with the other tools of pictorial composition.

Forms and textures make the picture unique

Much of the interest that a viewer finds in a picture is due to the individuality of its form and textures. Actually, it is this individuality that often draws the artist to the subject in the first place. How monotonous our pictures would be if in them there were only one kind of weather, one kind of tree, one type of cloth, one type of man and woman. But fortunately there are differences — big differences — and we should be eager to discover and take advantage of them.

Observation is the key here — careful observation and selection. Just as the reporter sifts through many facts and details to find the really significant ones, the artist studies his subject to learn the really important things about its form, texture, and other details. Through this knowledge he can create in his picture the illusion of what he has seen.

Norman Rockwell is a good example of an artist who knows how to make the most of what he observes. We recognize every person in his pictures as a distinct and real human being. The character's clothing, the setting in which we find him and the objects around him are appropriate down to the last detail. Because Rockwell has studied all these elements with care, he is able to paint pictures so lifelike and human that they have earned him the title of "America's most beloved illustrator."

The artist interprets

Drawing or painting different forms or textures calls for different approaches. There is no set formula for capturing the special quality of flesh, tree bark, rock, brick, or any other substance. Each artist will handle the subject in his own way. It is your feeling for the subject that counts. You do not copy forms and textures — you interpret them. Sometimes the picture calls for exaggeration, sometimes great simplicity. Never become so immersed in rendering a particular texture or form that you forget the over-all effect — the effect of the whole picture.

People have a definite personality, and things do, too. Study your subject for the special features and qualities that are significant in expressing this personality. They are there, often, in the line that contains the form, or in some of the details of the texture. Look for them and draw them. Used thoughtfully, they can help give your pictures originality and conviction, and make them more interesting and meaningful to your audience.

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Variety of form is everywhere

Every object has its own variety of form – it is different from every other object. This variety is what gives an object interest, makes us look at one thing with greater curiosity than another. It helps us to tell things apart and identify them – whether they are people, landscapes, animals, man-made articles, or anything else.

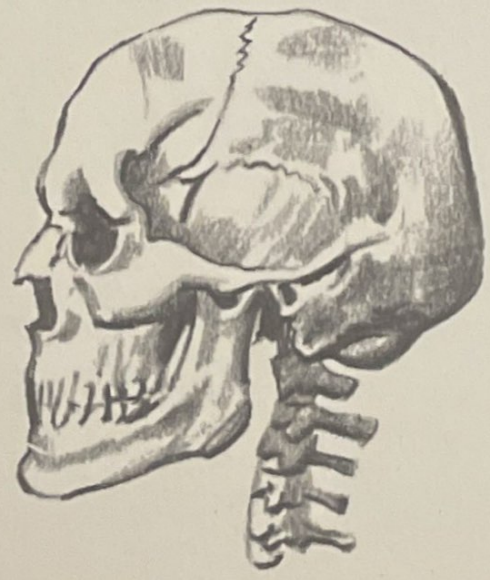
Even similar objects are different. Two articles may come from the same machine, yet each has variety if we know where to look for it. Each article occupies a different space, is struck differently by the light, or has a different background. To the artist, every one of these variations is important. He must train his eye to observe these differences, and he should use them in his interpretation of the object.

Trees offer good examples of what to look for in variety of form. The average person sees a tree as merely a general form with trunk, branches, and leaves. We, however, must know our trees better to draw and paint them well. There is a marked difference in structure and outline between a maple and a birch or other trees. Moreover, every tree is a particular tree in particular surroundings. An interest in the variety of forms will help us recognize the differences that make every form unique. Our aim should always be to know and show the special character of everything we draw.

Norman Rockwell has compared making a picture to throwing a ball against a wall: the ball never comes back quite as hard as we throw it. The artist must devote himself wholeheartedly to observing the distinctive personality of things and re-creating it in his pictures. Only if he does this will the viewer come close to seeing and feeling what the artist did.

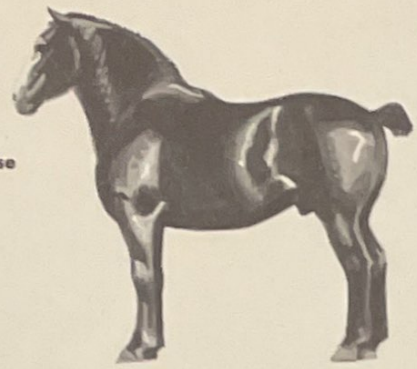
Draw a "particular" head

On the right are four similar views of men's heads. All four heads express friendly good nature, yet each head is different. The difference is due to variety of form or character. Study the heads closely and observe that Norman Rockwell has created an entirely different type of person with each one. Always study people wherever you go and try to establish what facial characteristics make a person an individual, setting him apart from all others. Remember, although there is a formula for drawing a basic head, there is no formula for giving it individuality. There is only your observing eye and your trained hand.



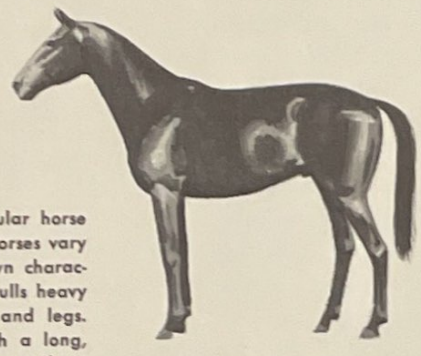
Although human skulls vary slightly, all human heads have pronounced differences which are due to variations in the elements that make up the head — the ears, the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the chin, etc.

The main characteristics of this man's head are: receding hairline, slightly turned under nose-tip, slightly receding chin, prominent jowls, habitually raised eyebrows with brow wrinkles — he got these from looking up and over his glasses. These characteristics indicate a mild-mannered man with a quiet sense of humor.



Draft horse

Shetland pony

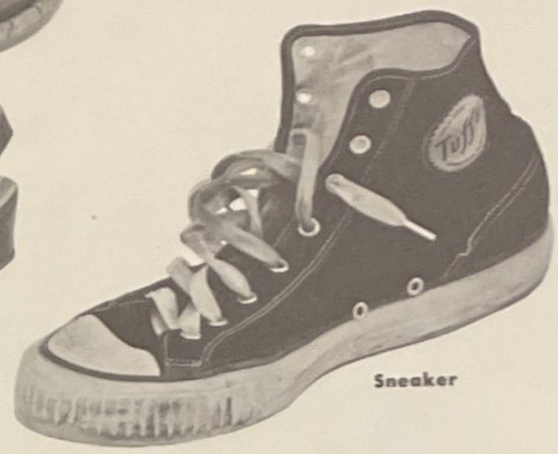


Race horse

Not just any horse, but a particular horse that is correct for your picture. Horses vary as to breed and each has its own characteristics. The draft horse, which pulls heavy loads, has a large, thick body and legs. The Shetland pony is small, with a long, rough coat, heavy mane and long tail. In contrast, the race horse has long, slender legs and a lithe body.

Loafer

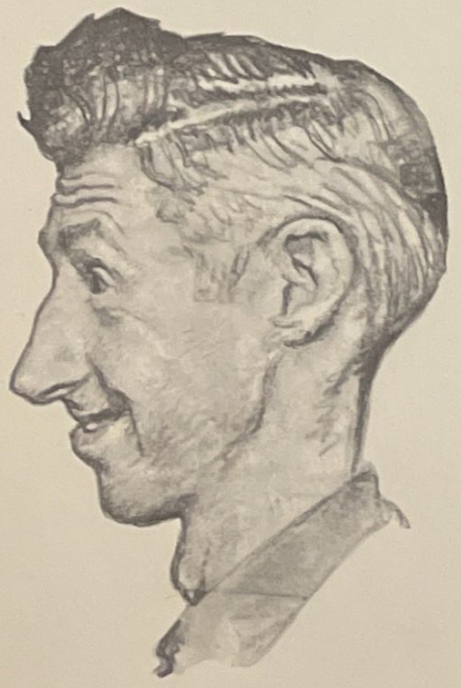
Sandal



Sneaker

High-heeled shoe

Each shoe has a character of its own. The sneaker, with its high sides, contrasts sharply with the casual loafer; sandal and high-heeled shoe also have distinctive forms. Each suits a different person or occasion.



The characteristic features of this young man's head are: thin face, large nose, receding chin, large shock of hair that is well attended to, thin neck with prominent Adam's apple. You can tell he is good-natured and probably slow-witted — timid and somewhat juvenile.

The prominent features of this man's head are: broken nose, slightly cauliflower ear, prominent wrinkles around eyes and leathery creases on the back of the neck. An outdoor man, he has squinted so long at bright daylight that wrinkles around his eyes were an early acquisition. Never one to avoid a good fight, he is nevertheless an easy-going man more interested in today's ball game than tomorrow's problems.

This man's head tells a good deal about his character. The main characteristics are: very round, fat face, head balding in the best business-man tradition, jowls prominent, eyes puffy — possibly from cigar smoke. He is a worrier, a community booster, a "good fellow."

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Photo by Clarisse — Ewing Galloway, N. Y.

Although both of these dogs are dachshunds, they almost look like two different breeds because of the difference in the textures of their coats. The long wavy hair of one variety contrasts sharply with the short smooth coat of the other.

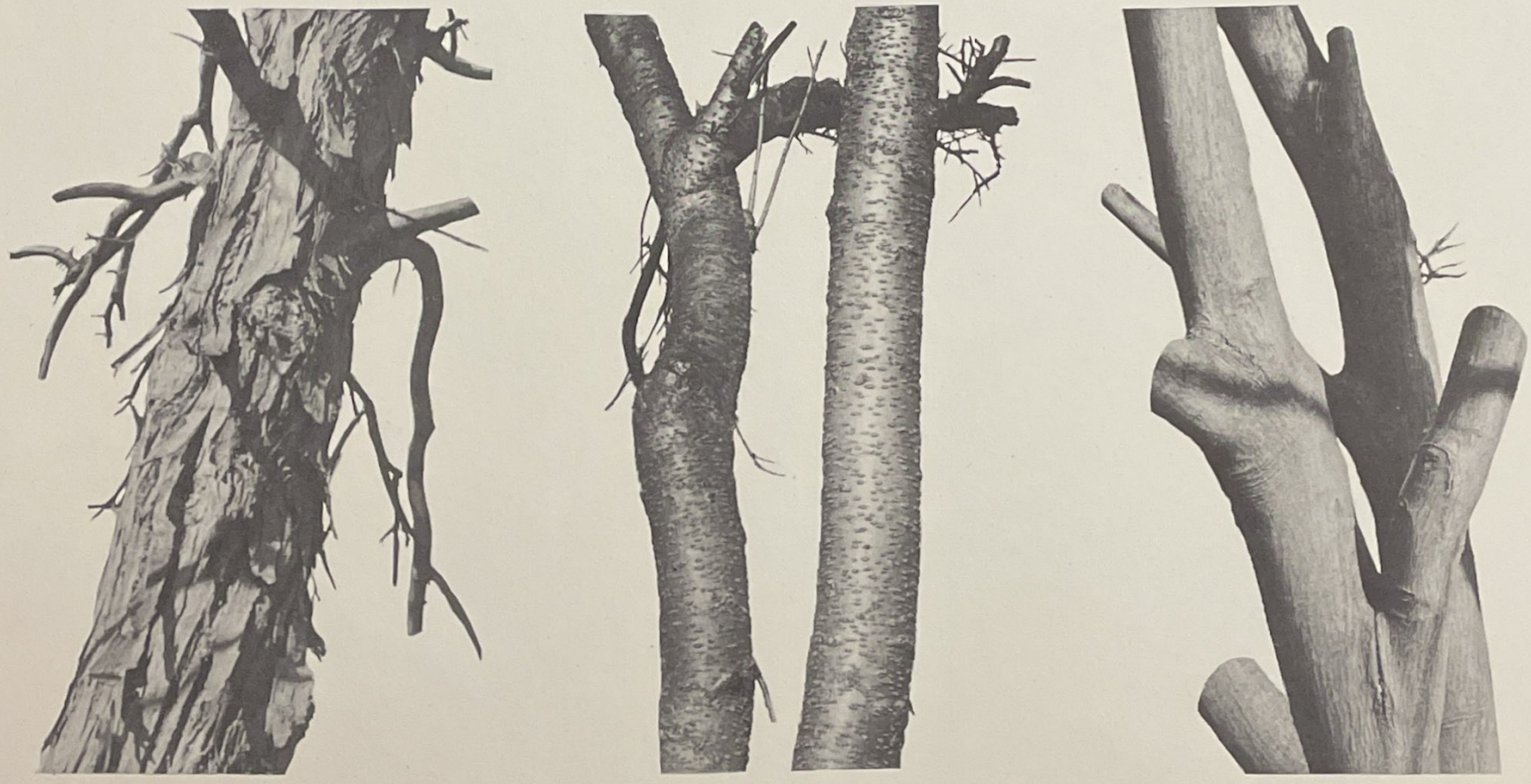
Variety in textures

We recognize an object not only by its particular form but also by the texture of its surface. Things are smooth, rough, soft, or hard. In the clothes we wear, tweed is rough and silk is smooth — and these differences in texture help us to tell them apart by sight as well as by touch.

In our pictures we must create the illusion of the surface textures of things. The first step in doing this is to find out the true character of the surface. Is it soft and yielding? Hard and resisting? Coarse or smooth? Glossy or dull? Look at the object and ask yourself such questions as you study its surface. Know it as thoroughly as you possibly can and decide which characteristics identify it best.

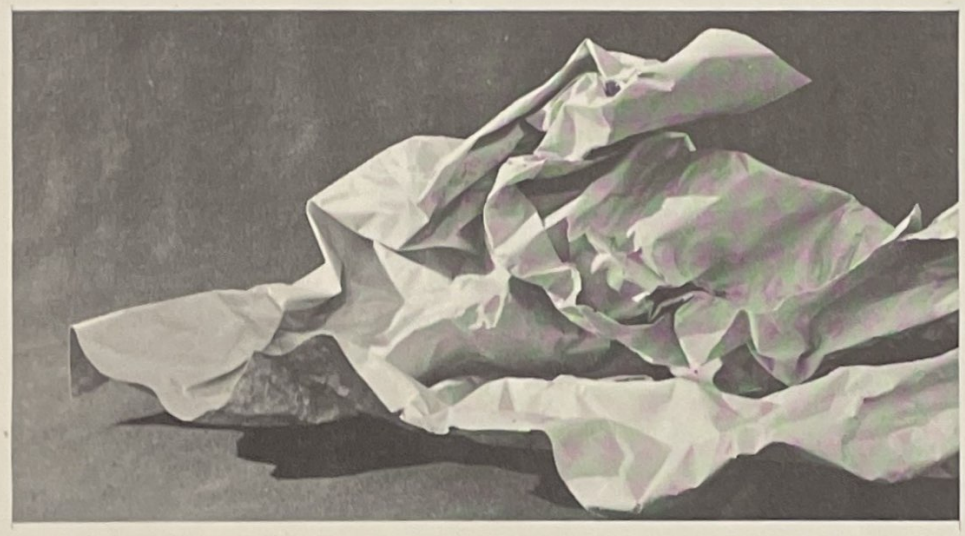
When you know the character of the texture, the next step is to decide how to show it in your picture. Here again a few questions can prove very helpful. For example, what sort of pencil or brush strokes would best interpret the texture? Should they be long or short, straight or curved, rough or smooth?

You'll do a better job if you think how a texture feels as you draw it. Remember that although the artist relies most on a well-trained, observing eye, he must also take advantage of what his other senses contribute.



Just as the particular form of an object helps us to identify it, so does its particular texture. The artist should be keenly aware of the character of each surface he draws. Every tree, for example, has a typical surface texture. The shagbark hickory *(left)* is covered with coarse, irregular bark. In contrast, the bark of the cherry *(center)* has small raised markings that run around it. Japanese maple bark *(right)* is very smooth.

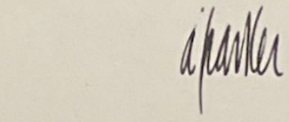
Cloth: Smooth, curving folds help us to recognize this as a piece of soft cloth. The folds flow together to form smooth planes and outlines.

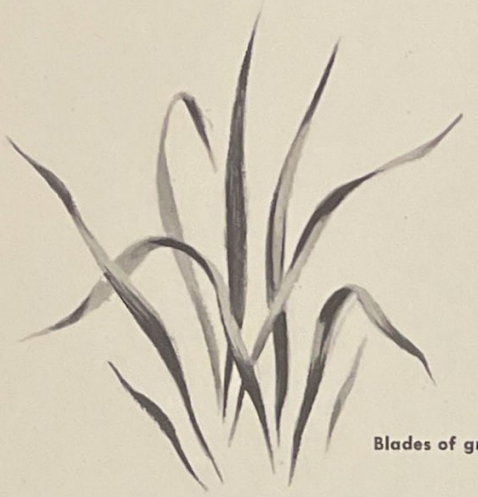


Paper: In contrast to the soft cloth, the crumpled paper is crisp and angular. Note the irregular outline and the sharp edges between the jagged planes of light and shade.

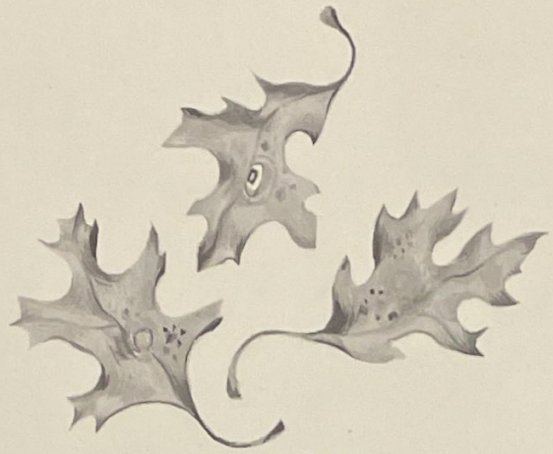
Pail and stones: Each of these two contrasting textures brings out the differing qualities of the other. Seen together, the metal seems smoother, the stones coarser.

"I suggest you experiment with texture. A good way is to place in front of you three similar objects such as a piece of Kleenex, a paper napkin, and a damask napkin. Each one is white and soft, yet it has its own character. Paint all three. Then show them to a friend and see if he can identify these various articles simply by the way you have painted them. Try this again using wire, string, and thread. Study carefully the things you paint in every illustration you do."





Blades of grass



Leaves

Bricks

When we look at a meadow, tree foliage, or a brick wall we do not see individual blades of grass, leaves, or bricks so much as an over-all tone and texture. Look for this over-all texture and draw it or paint it as you actually see it.

Repeated forms make an over-all texture

When a single form is repeated often enough – whether it is a blade of grass, a leaf, a brick, or anything else – a new texture is created. This new texture is not simply the result of multiplying the original form. In drawing a grassy field, for example, we do not show an area filled with many individual blades of grass that are uniform in size and shape. In some parts of the real field the growth may be sparse, in others very thick. Individual blades will vary in their size and direction of growth. And, at a distance of more than a few feet, we could not possibly distinguish the separate blades anyhow. They blend to form an over-all tone and texture that we recognize and draw as a field.

The variations we find in a field of grass are just as striking in foliage, where the leaves grow in every direction and are struck by sunlight or shadow in different degrees. In the dense parts of the foliage the leaves form an almost solid texture, while in other parts they merge in a thinner, more delicate pattern against the sky.

A brick wall, too, is something different from the sum total of its individual bricks. Looking at a wall, especially in bright sunlight or deep shade, we are often more aware of its over-all texture than the individual bricks. It is this over-all texture, rather than the separate bricks, that we paint to create a convincing illusion of the wall.

Texture and mood

Repeated forms create texture – and often the artist can use this texture to emphasize and strengthen his picture idea. In this illustration by Albert Dorne an agitated young man is arguing with a rather indifferent girl. The feeling of conflict between the two is clearly reflected in the choppy, agitated texture formed by the chickens. The figures are the main actors, but the sea of busy, excited chickens contributes greatly to the mood and interest of the picture.

Notice the way Dorne has organized the chickens. They form an area of texture that fills the lower half of the picture. If the chickens had been isolated into small groups or formed spotty designs against the dark earth, the figures would not stand out nearly so well. Dorne has used the chickens to strengthen the composition and its meaning at the same time.

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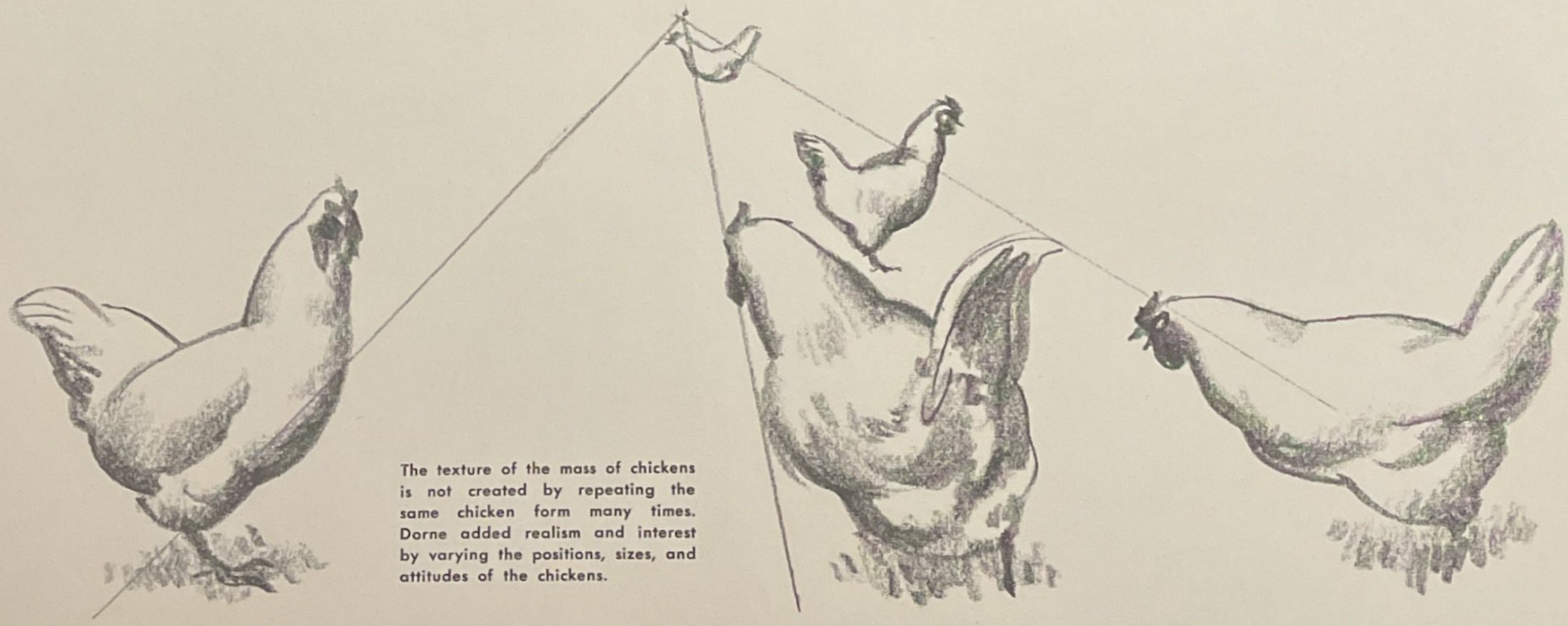


The texture of the mass of chickens is not created by repeating the same chicken form many times. Dorne added realism and interest by varying the positions, sizes, and attitudes of the chickens.

How distance affects texture and details

Distance, we have seen, has a marked effect on textures. If an object is close to us, we can observe its textural details clearly and sharply. But the further off the object is from us, the less we can see of these details.

To drive this point home, we might look down a street and compare the details of the nearest building with the details of similar ones further away. On the nearest house the rough surface of the shingles, for example, is easy to see, but a few houses away this textural surface is lost and we notice only the over-all pattern formed by the shingles. Far down the street even this disappears — all that is left is a simple textureless tone.

At close quarters, as in a room, we can observe the same principle at work, although the contrast will not be so great because of the shorter distance. In a picture, the sense of depth can be greatly strengthened by applying this principle. For instance, the nubby tweed covering of a chair in the foreground might be emphasized to help keep the chair well forward. A matching chair on the far side of the room might be held there by painting only the tone of the chair — we would not see its texture at a distance.

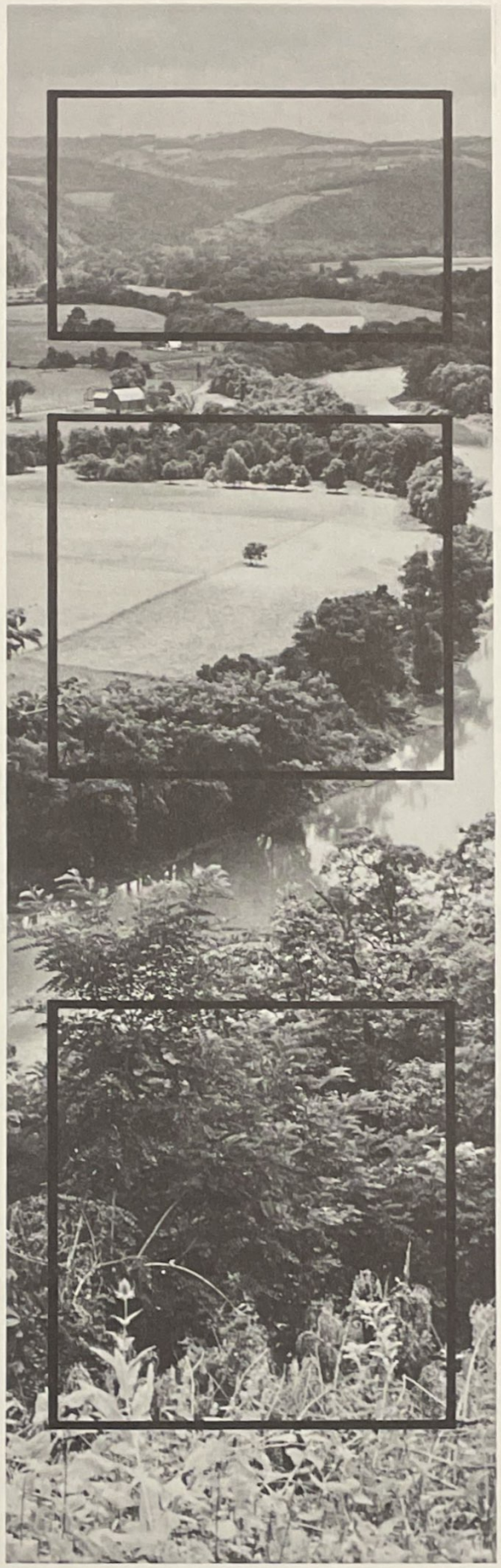
There is an all-important difference between knowing a texture or detail is there and actually seeing it there. It is a mistake to show the texture of objects in a picture when they are too far off for that texture to be seen in reality.

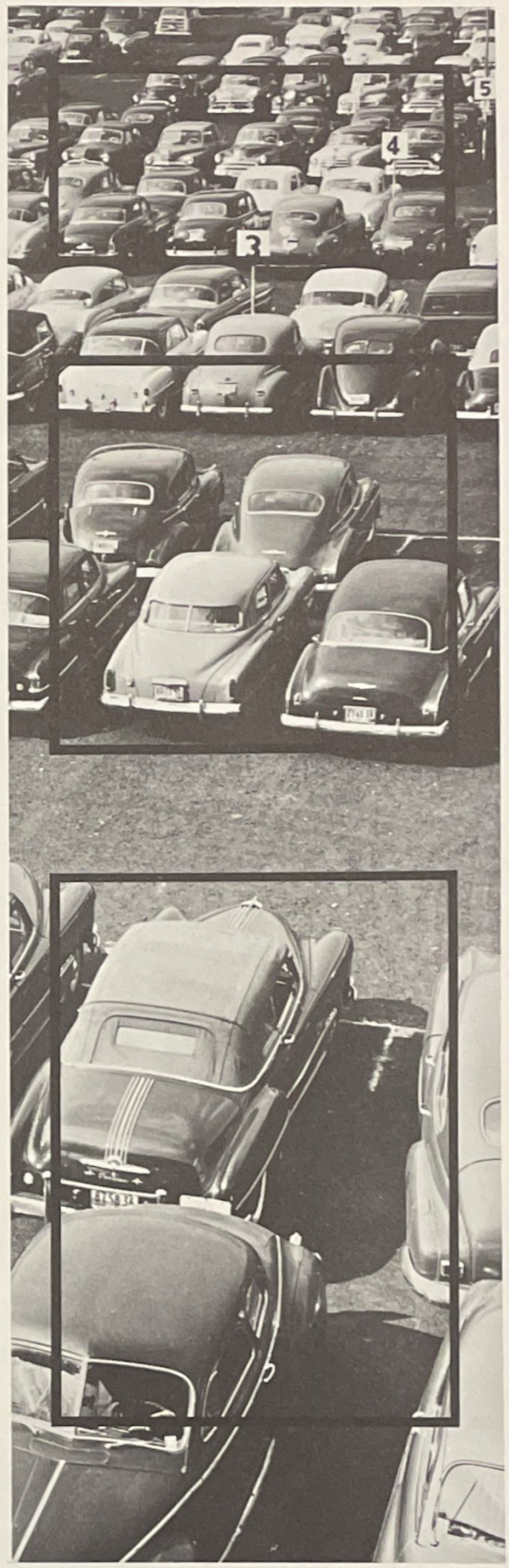
Creating a convincing illusion of anything depends just as much on omitting what you cannot see as it does on drawing what you can see.

These four pictures show you how distance affects textures. Close up, all the details of texture stand out clearly — the man's hair strands, the differing surfaces of the tweed jacket and the wool sweater, and the rough mortar between the bricks, each of which has its own individuality. Note how all of these details become less apparent as the figure is seen from further away. The textures become less important, the value pattern becomes more important. In the furthest picture three basic values are practically all that remain — the light value of the face, the dark one of the hair and clothing, and the halftone of the wall.

See — Observe — Remember

Courtesy Ewing Galloway





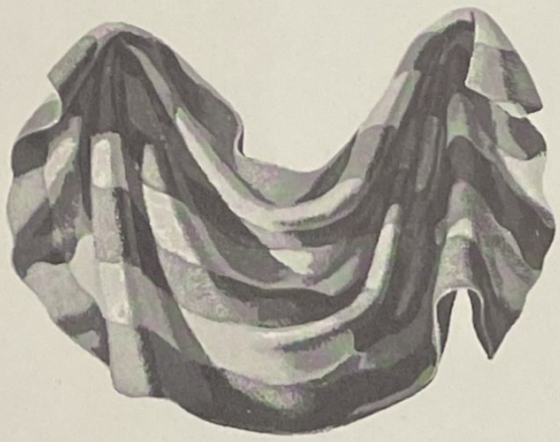
These three pictures also point out the differences in what you see in the way of texture and details at varying distances. Only in the foreground are details like facial expression and clothing texture visible on figures; only close up can you see individual leaves and smaller branches on trees or the metal trim on cars. In the middle distance these details begin to give way to a more obvious pattern of tones – shapes of light, dark, or halftone. In the far distance, even this pattern has lost its clarity. The repeated forms of figures and cars become an over-all texture, while the values of trees, hills and fields tend to merge.

Pattern – another form of texture

Besides surface texture there is another kind of texture known as pattern. This is simply the flat, two-dimensional design on a surface such as fabric, wallpaper, or the like.

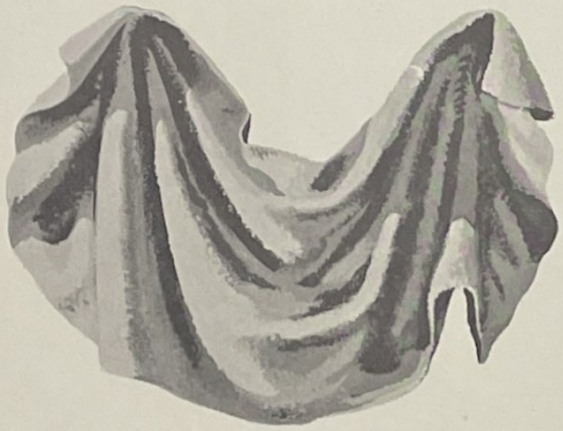
In some pictures we may wish to emphasize pattern and subordinate surface texture. In others we may concentrate more on surface texture. Sometimes we will emphasize both. The examples below show how these different elements may be stressed.

Remember, before you draw any object, that the form of that object comes first. Without its form, details of texture or pattern usually mean very little. No matter what the object is, its form must always be apparent – even though you need not give it the same emphasis under every condition.

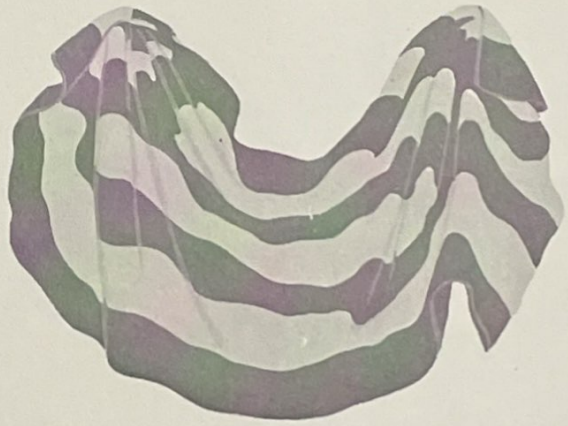


This striped towel is realistic and convincing. Form, texture, and pattern are all there.

Here is the form underneath. This is what the towel would look like if it were cast in plaster.

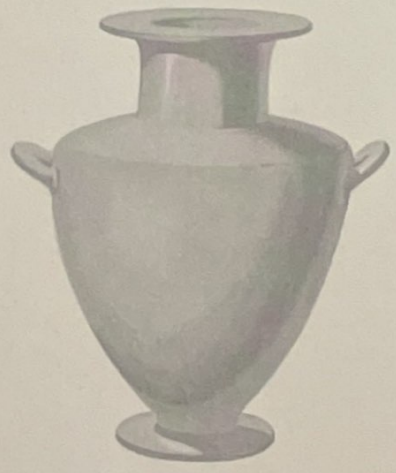


If we wanted to play down the pattern, we could show the rough, nubby texture like this.



Then, again, we might work decoratively and rely entirely on the striped pattern to carry the drawing.

This vase is shown as it would appear to the eye. It is complete in form, texture, and pattern.



This is the pure form of the vase minus texture and pattern. It's as if the vase were smooth plaster.

Here the vase is handled strictly in terms of surface texture. There is no pattern or design at all.

As an alternative, we might focus on the pattern of the vase. Here there is no surface texture.

Here are two different but equally effective ways we might treat the same subject. In this realistic drawing, the emphasis is on the play of light and shade, which models the over-all forms and surface textures and brings them out in sharp relief. The flat pattern of ornamentation on the dark coat is of secondary importance.

In this more decorative drawing the textural interest is created by emphasizing the tones of the flat pattern. Modeled surface textures are held to a minimum except on the hat. Throughout the rest of the drawing, smooth tones of light and dark are played against each other. The coat consists of flat tone and outline with virtually no shading.

What we have said about the texture and pattern of single objects also applies in a picture made up of many objects. Here the repeated rectangular forms of buildings and signs create an area of busy irregular texture. The artist has emphasized realistic form and texture and treated the pattern as incidental.

By contrast, in this picture the realistic texture is played down and the flat two-dimensional pattern is emphasized instead. The artist has concentrated on the signs, bricks, and decorative trim of the buildings. Although there are shadows, they are highly simplified and do not interfere with the over-all pattern.

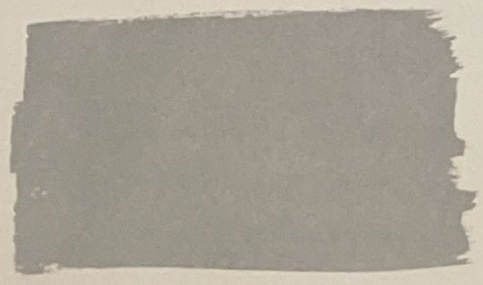
How to gain confidence in handling textures

Experiment is the key to learning about textures — experiment in a spirit of play. So, in your first adventures with textures, relax and have fun. Get out paper and illustration board and spread out before you some familiar tools and mediums — pencil and pen, brush, palette knife, opaque grays, a little lampblack wash, etc. Then go ahead and see what you can do with them. Experiment, play around, discover.

Work freely — there are no set rules to follow in getting acquainted with textures. Put down some tones and place others on top of them. Make different textures and set them side by side. Discover for yourself the many different effects you can create with thick and thin paint, short and long lines, light washes and dark ones, and other mediums and techniques.

In every case, after you have applied a texture, sit back and ask yourself what effect it creates. See how it relates to the texture next to it, and perhaps gains meaning by contrast with it. The arbitrary textures that you have set down so freely will begin to suggest real materials like wood, rock, grass, or foliage.

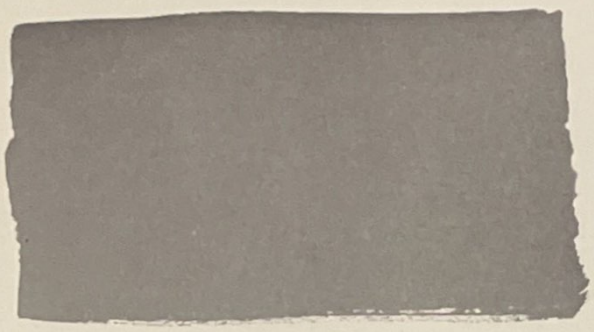
Not even the greatest artists mastered the subject of textures overnight, or in a week or a month. Textures are something we go on learning about. And the way to get off to a good start — to get the feel of textures — is to experiment freely.



This demonstration will show how simple strokes and tones can suggest real objects and their textures. We'll also see how one texture relates to another and gives it meaning. We begin by laying down this flat, light gray opaque tone.

Now, working experimentally, we put down some broad, squarish strokes with the side of the palette knife. They might call to mind rock shapes. Then, with the palette knife edge, we make some long straight strokes — they resemble grass or weeds.

Now we put them together. The flat background might suggest the sky. It acts as a fine foil for the dark rocklike shapes and the long, thin grasslike strokes. Each texture has a distinct character, particularly by contrast with the others.

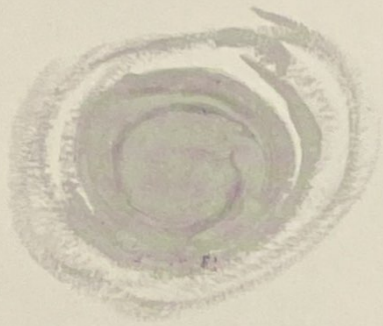


The same simple tools can create an endless variety of textures. We'll start with the same smooth tone as before, but this time make it slightly darker.

We can build up a raised texture by laying on thick, juicy opaque paint with a trowel-like action of the palette knife. Next we try a darker, thinner texture.

If we put the two rough textures together on the smooth dark background, we get this effect. It could suggest a rock or masonry, set against the sky.

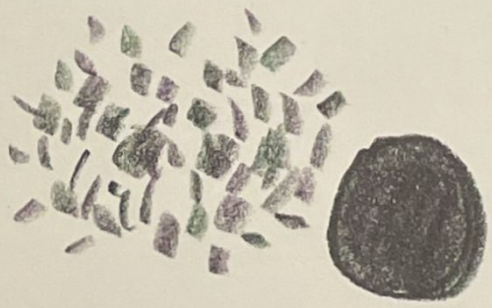
Now let's try a thin transparent wash with our paint. We begin by laying down the wash, let some of the edges dry, and wipe out the center with a rather dry brush.



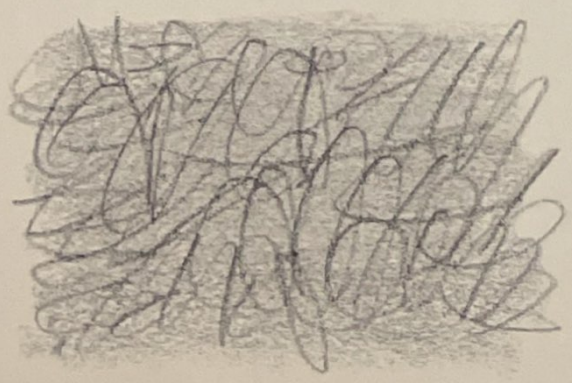
A contrasting heavy, thick paint brushed on in concentric rings creates the effect at the left. At the right we try some dots of medium thick opaque.

Here we put them all together. Into the wet wash we brush our opaque rings and black dots. The effect suggests the sun or moon peering through clouds.

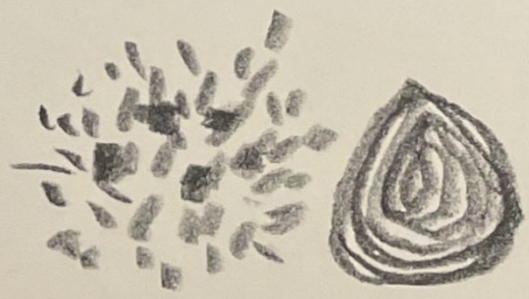
A flat pencil tone, many short, broad chisel-point strokes, and a single dark shape — when we put them together



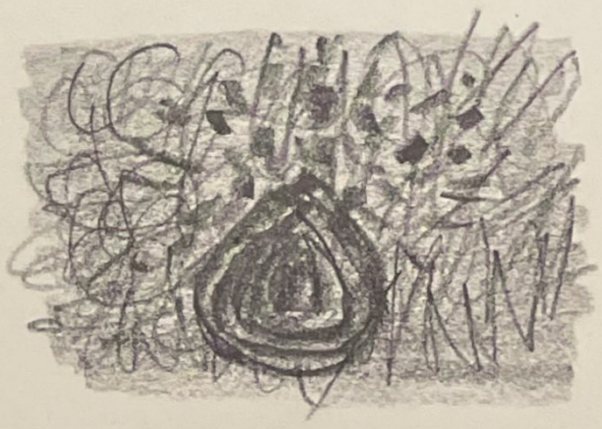
experimentally, as at the right, they might suggest the shape and texture of a bowl of flowers against a wall.



Our three elements are almost the same as in the preceding demonstration, with some small but significant differences. Notice that the flat pencil tone has a scrawl in it and the bowl-like shape is more complicated. When

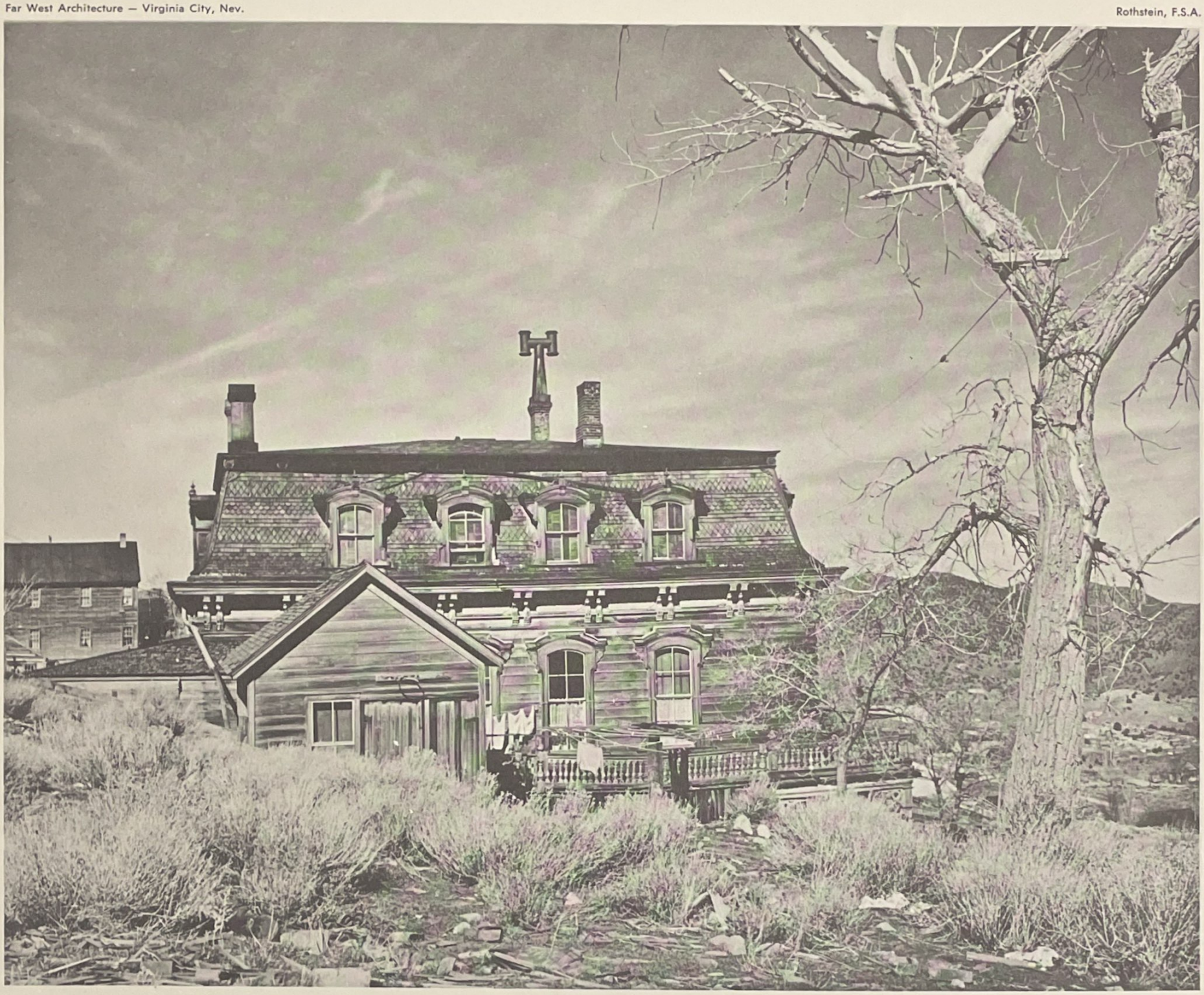


we combine all these textures the result is busy and confused. The important point here is that we should be aware of just what effect each texture has and be sure that it is the effect we want.

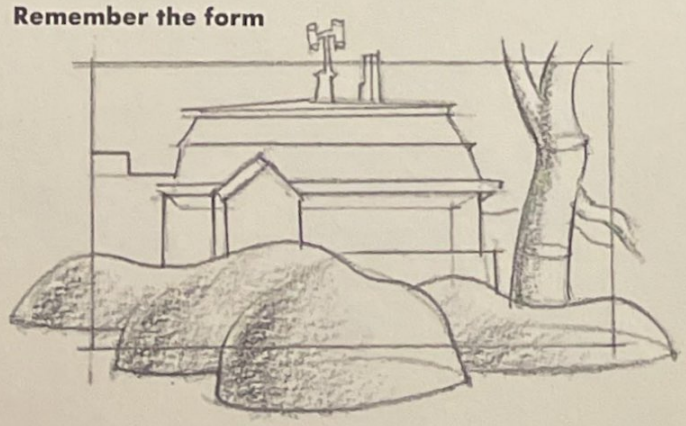


Creating variety in forms, textures and surfaces

Far West Architecture — Virginia City, Nev. Rothstein, F.S.A.



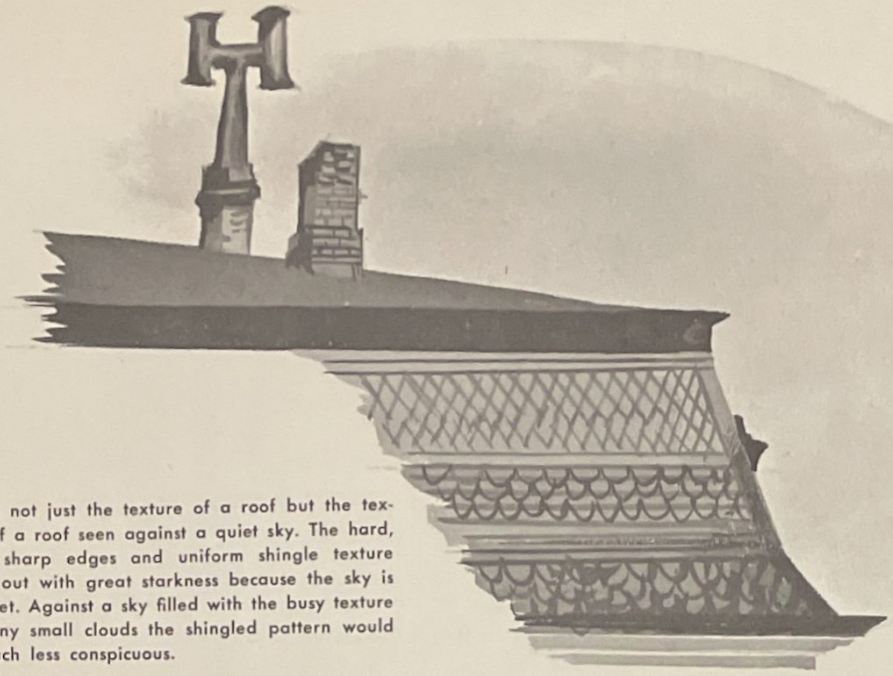
Remember the form



Don't forget the solid forms which underlie the surface textures. The textures should not conceal these forms — they should make us see and understand them clearly.

Applying the principles

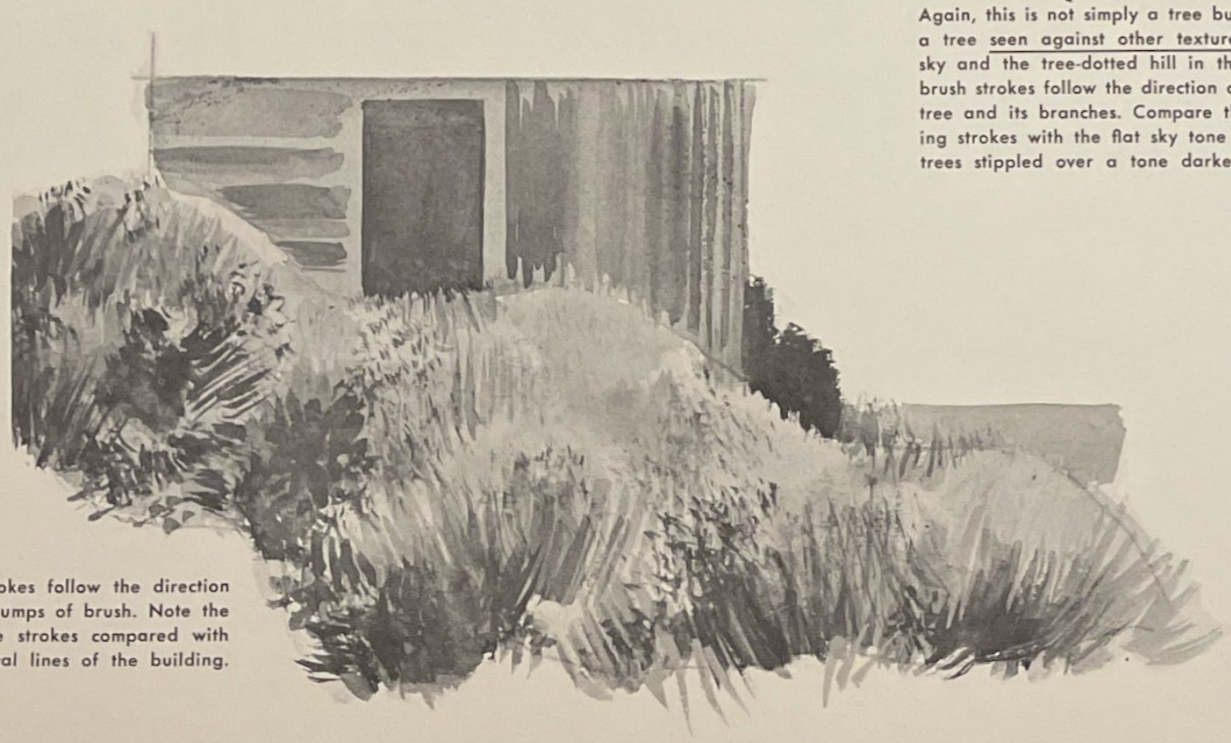
Now let's see how the things we have learned so far can be used to interpret the textures in a scene. We'll take the photograph on this page as our subject. At the start, we must study its textures until we know their character. The tree bark, we see, is rough and furrowed, the sky is smooth. We observe the smooth, uniform lines of the siding of the house, the shingle pattern of the roof, the fuzzy clumps of brush. Above all, we notice how each texture contrasts with the textural surfaces next to it. With these points clearly in mind, we can begin to put textures on paper.



This is not just the texture of a roof but the texture of a roof seen against a quiet sky. The hard, dark, sharp edges and uniform shingle texture stand out with great starkness because the sky is so quiet. Against a sky filled with the busy texture of many small clouds the shingled pattern would be much less conspicuous.

We must be aware of what pattern, as well as surface textures, can contribute to our picture. Much of the interest in this area is created by the rectangles of black, white, and gray in the windows and by the light shapes of the clothes on the line. The repeated forms of the railing and siding add further textural interest.

Again, this is not simply a tree but the texture of a tree seen against other textures — the smooth sky and the tree-dotted hill in the distance. The brush strokes follow the direction of growth of the tree and its branches. Compare these long, curving strokes with the flat sky tone and the distant trees stippled over a tone darker than the sky.

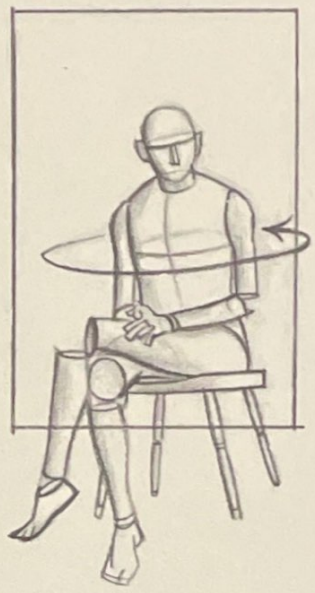


The long, thin brush strokes follow the direction of growth of the thick clumps of brush. Note the varied direction of these strokes compared with the vertical and horizontal lines of the building.

Creating variety in forms, textures and surfaces

Photo by William Joli

Every texture must be related to the over-all value pattern of the picture. Here are the main shapes of light, dark, and halftone the overlying textures must not obscure.



Under the texture there is a three-dimensional form — and we must never lose sight of this form as we put in the details. The texture of the wrinkled face fits over the solid form of the head. The well-worn coat and trousers fit around the basic form of the figure.

The lettering and the design on the feed bag are part of its texture. They form a pattern that adds interest to the upper part of the picture and helps balance the busier textures below. The burlap texture also plays its part.

Controlling textures

This photograph illustrates a problem we face with most of the pictures we draw and paint. The subject may include a large variety of interesting and contrasting textures — but, unless we decide in advance how to control these textures, they can obscure or destroy the forms and values of the subject.

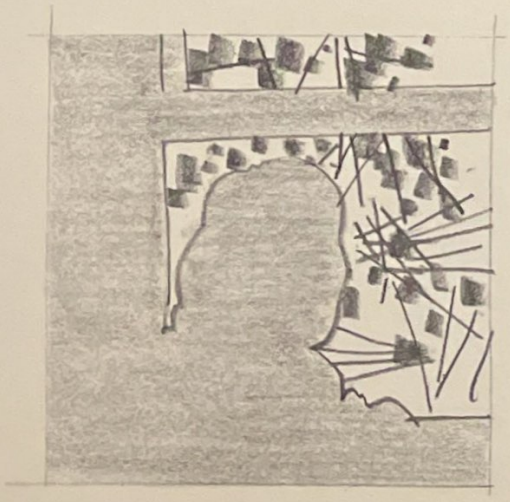
In planning a picture, you should be aware of all the textures and their relative importance in the over-all picture. For example, almost everything here has a fairly busy texture. The weathered grain of the boards, the wrinkles of the man's face, the folds of his coat, the pattern of the feed bag in the window, even the vines at the lower left — all of these create different, active textures. If you tried to render each one without comparing it to the rest, the result might be very confusing. Decide how dark or how light to make each texture and see that it does not become too important. If any textures are emphasized too strongly, they may not only weaken the effect but also make the solid forms underneath appear flat and hard to recognize. Compare your textures constantly as you work, and make sure that each one is correctly related to the rest and holds its place in the over-all picture. Always keep your textures under control.

Contrast in textures

Let's analyze this photograph for its textures just as if we were going to base a picture on it. The over-all effect is one of smooth, quiet textures set against a contrasting background of busy ones. There is no strong, clear-cut pattern of light and shade on the girl, as there is on the old man. The tones are even and regular.

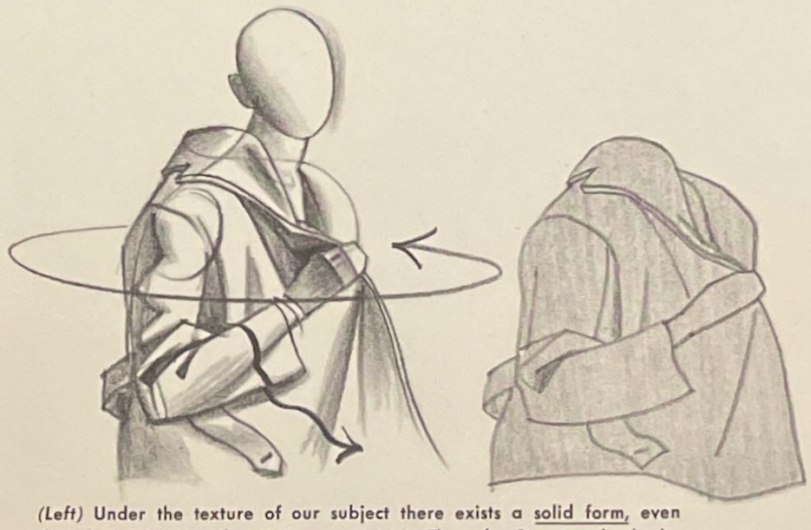
It is important to give dramatic textures their due — and just as important not to overwork simple ones. The girl's hair, for example, is a single, simple shape, almost solid in its texture — light strikes only a small area at the top. If we gave this simple black form more detailed texture we might destroy its over-all shape or confuse it with the scene outside the window. This is equally true of the simple textures of the girl's skin and robe and the wall. Always keep simple textures simple when they are set against a busy background of active forms and textures.

Photo by William Joli



These are the textural contrasts in the picture — the quiet foreground of girl and wall set against the busy background of the scene outside the window.

This diagram shows the basic shapes and values of the foreground. These few flat tones lack modeling, yet they strongly suggest our subject — proving how simple its tones are.



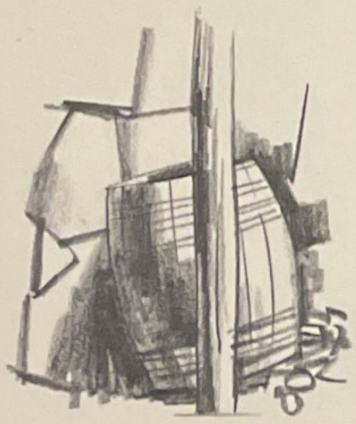
(Left) Under the texture of our subject there exists a solid form, even though the lighting does not accentuate it. The robe fits over the body, and it has form of its own, with folds and wrinkles. *(Right)* You must also be aware of the basic value pattern on the solid structure. Keep both in mind as you plan your picture and draw and paint it.

The interest and variety of drawn textures

Robert Fawcett's keen awareness of textures and the very careful way he draws each one are well demonstrated in this picture. Notice the fascinating variety of materials he shows us here — stone, wood, brick, water, metal, cloth, and others, often in different shapes and forms. Fawcett draws each of these textures, and by his drawing shows us whether a thing is rough or smooth, dull or shiny, hard or soft. He does not rely on paint thickness or thinness, or the actual character of paint. His drawing carries the illusion.

This section of the background contains a pattern of highly varied, interesting textures. The roof texture of the house at the left is kept fairly quiet and smooth to bring out the leaves and contrast with the brick wall. On the roof of the house at the right the details of the slate-covered roof are shown, but the wall is completely flat. In front, the grain of the knotty, weathered pole provides another contrast.

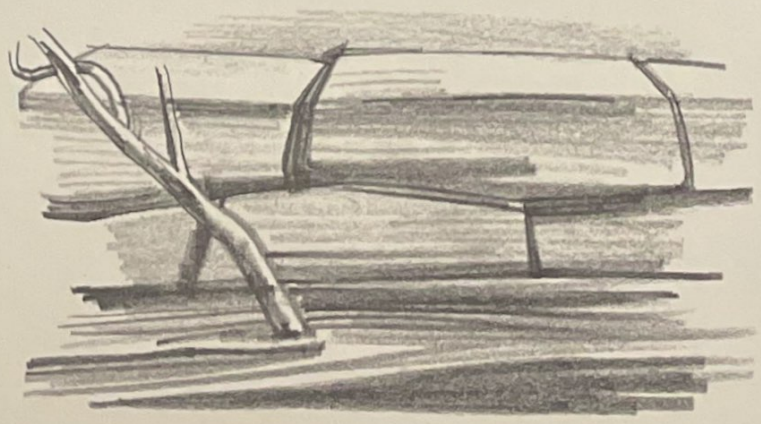
Fawcett has focused our attention sharply on the man's head by placing it against a simple white background — one of the few quiet areas in the whole picture. Had he set the head against the lively textures of slate roofs, bricks or chimneys, its impact would be greatly weakened.



The barrel form stands out against the pattern of smooth rocks with just the slightest indication of the texture of staves and bands. A few simple strokes are enough to suggest the texture of the pole in front.

This area along the right edge of the picture again demonstrates Fawcett's awareness of textures and how they can be used to create interest through variety. Note that he has placed the curving horizontal lines of the boat against the background of plain large rocks and above the more detailed pattern of small stones.

The wall and water are a very important part of this illustration. To emphasize them, Fawcett has used long, broad, horizontal lines and tones that contrast sharply with every other texture in the picture, and particularly the stones directly above.



Doris Lee

Pattern and texture make an attractive design

Every artist has his own way of handling textures. Here, in contrast with Robert Fawcett's precise method, we see how Doris Lee works. Her style is far from literal, and she uses her textures in a highly personal way, creating a picture that looks like a tapestry. Stylized as these textures are, however, we have no difficulty in recognizing the sky, road, bushes, and other objects here. Notice, too, how the artist arranges her textures and patterns to form an over-all design with a vigor and charm peculiarly her own.

Awareness of form: Although there are many textures here and the design made by them dominates the picture, they still suggest the form underneath. Doris Lee paints in an extremely personal way, but she is very much aware of form as she plans her picture and lays in the textures.

Courtesy Standard Oil Co.

Picture elements: Tree, bushes, and house are not painted realistically, but their textures and lines show they are based on reality. Note that Doris Lee painted her bushes in two different ways — as almost wholly flat shapes with decorative flowers on top and also as forms more convincingly modeled in light and dark.

Over-all design: The artist arranged her forms and textures to create an attractive over-all design. Note the varied arrangement of the bushes on either side of the road, the simple dark stream, and beyond that the pattern of lines in the plowed fields. The hills in the background are strongly stylized, and Doris Lee has set light against dark and dark against light for an interesting effect.

© The Curtis Publishing Co.

Textures help make a picture

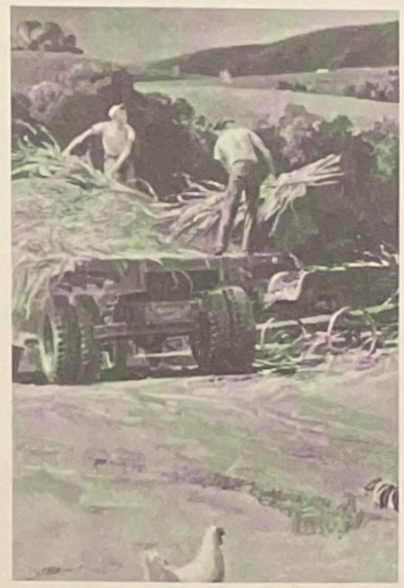
This painting by Peter Helck is a fine example of how contrasting textures enrich the picture and help point up the character of the objects in it.

Three main elements, each with its own texture, dominate the picture — the soft, billowing clouds, the smoother forms of the buildings, and the ragged, stringy pile of corn shucks. Each texture becomes more obvious and meaningful because we see it next to a contrasting surface.

The huge rounded cloud forms are painted in with wide edges and subtle tones. The emphasis is on the softness of the shapes.

The buildings are essentially smooth, with the boards and shingles creating a uniform texture over the cube form of the barn.

The most active texture in the picture is the pile of corn shucks. Helck was especially careful to accent the long streaming leaves trailing above the ground and sticking up along the top of the pile.



This section of the picture contains the secondary or less obvious textures — the relatively smooth ground and, in the middle distance, the dark foliage which helps to show up the figures on the truck.

Textures handled freely and suggestively

These two story illustrations show the free, suggestive way an imaginative artist uses texture to create a mood. In each of these pictures Austin Briggs has worked with limited means to produce a major effect.

The picture at the right shows a veteran of the Civil War sitting under a tree. The old man is trembling with great excitement – and Briggs makes us feel this excitement with the lines and textures he has used. Sometimes the lines are thin and fragile, sometimes they are dark and dramatic. Over all, the artist laid a ragged, vibrating dry-brush texture superbly appropriate to the subject of his picture.

In the illustration below, an old Victorian house is pictured for us just as simply and effectively. Note the variety of textures here – the scalloped shingles, the clapboard siding, and the shutters. Even though the individual shingles are not drawn in detail, Briggs has suggested their character with his rough strokes. By scumbling in ink tone over parts of the house, he makes us feel it is weather-beaten and old.

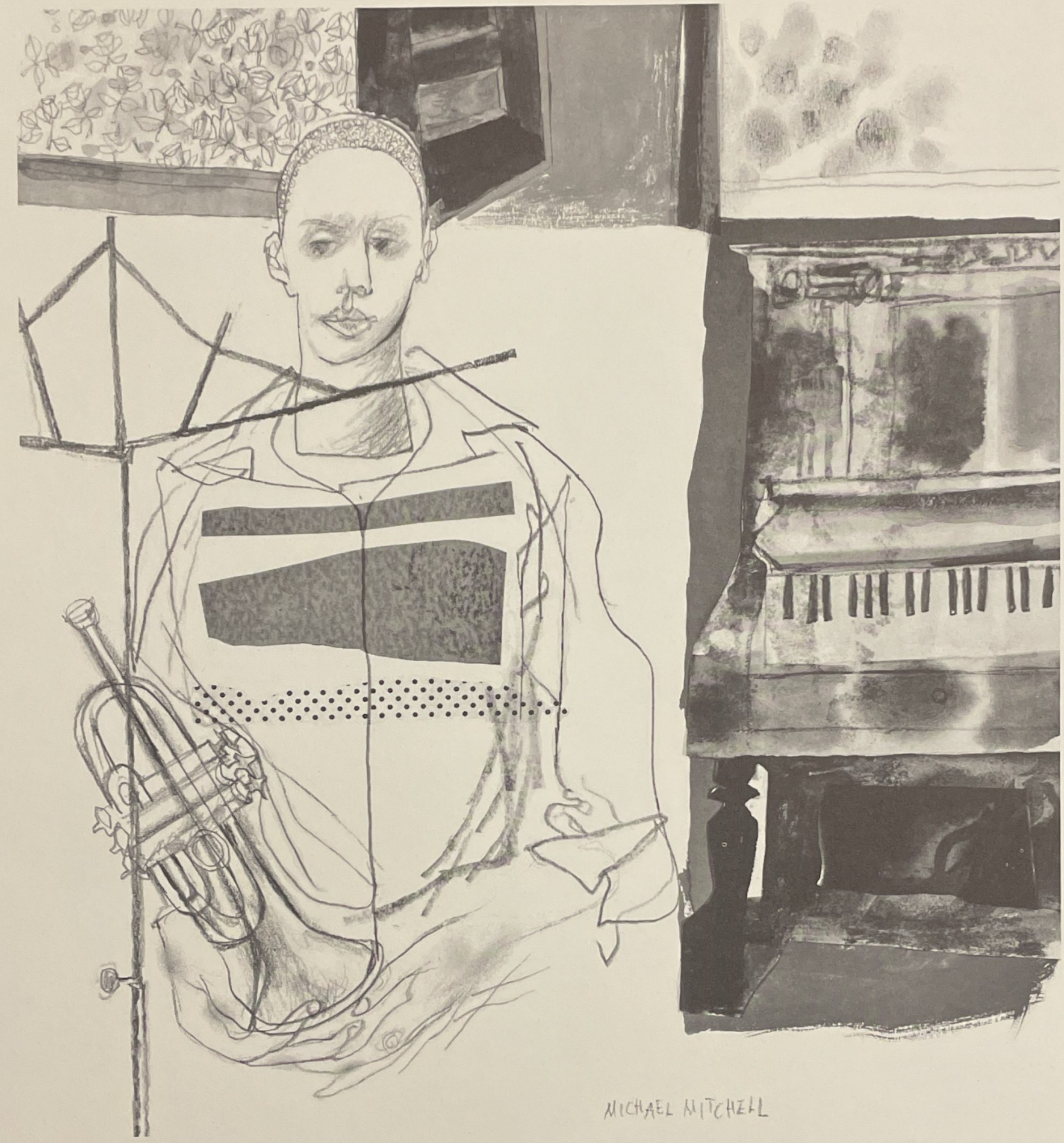
Courtesy Cosmopolitan

Courtesy Good Housekeeping

A contrast in approaches

Although the artist's inspiration for the textures in his pictures springs from what he observes in life, he is in no way limited to copying what he sees, or even interpreting it realistically. The contrasting use of texture in these two pictures demonstrates the point. In the first picture, done entirely in opaque, the artist has interpreted the forms and textures much the way he saw them. Although not painted with photographic accuracy, the solid forms of the boy and piano, as well as the room around them, are convincingly real. So are the textures. The boy's curly hair, the soft wool of his clothes, and his shiny trumpet are all fairly realistic interpretations of the subject.

The second picture shows an entirely different approach. Here the elements are almost the same, but the artist has interpreted them in a very



MICHAEL MITCHELL

personal, individual manner. He has not attempted to create the illusion of reality. Instead, he has taken his cue from his imagination and feelings and changed his subject freely to create an interesting and original design.

Notice the extreme contrasts of texture and the variety of mediums used to achieve them in this picture. Leaving out the background behind the boy, the artist has vignetted the figure in loose pencil line against the white paper. This linear pattern contrasts with the darker wet wash tones of the piano and the solid opaque around it. The doorway has this same feeling of tonal mass. In the upper left corner, the busy wallpaper pattern creates still another texture. All of this variety catches the eye and leads it around the paper excitingly. This is form and texture used in a fresh, creative way.

Creating variety in forms, textures and surfaces

Here are further examples which show how texture can be used to enrich both realistic and abstract pictures. All four pictures were done in opaque water color.

The textures in this picture are realistic ones, brought out by the light which strikes the surfaces of the objects. The natural smoothness of the bowl and fruit contrasts with the coarser leaves and the busy pattern of the wallpaper. Note how the textures and edges, which are quite apparent in the light, tend to disappear in the shadow.

This is an abstract version of the same subject. Here the artist departed from the actual textures and created these original ones to make an interesting personal design. He freely interpreted and emphasized the wallpaper design and the watermelon seeds, and showed the flat pattern rather than the texture on the bowl. Drapery, apples, and leaves have been simplified and reduced to flat shapes.

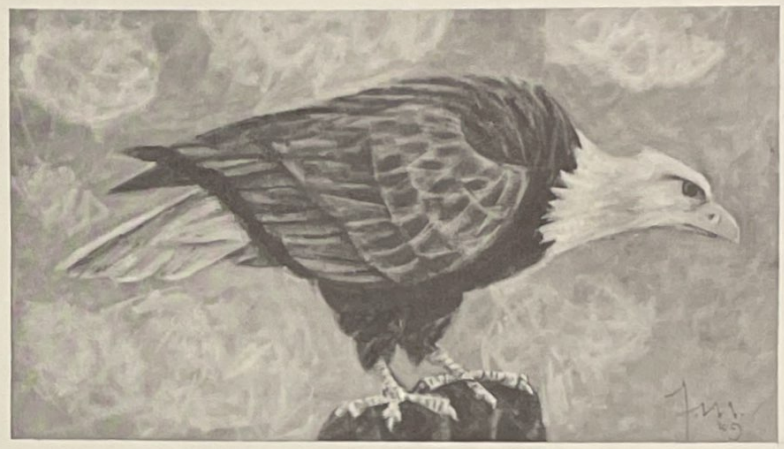
As in the still life at the top left, the emphasis here is on realistic textures and forms. The smooth, quiet surfaces of the snow, barn, and sky are put down quite literally. The twisted tree and its realistic shadow contrast strongly with these smoother textures. We can clearly see the texture of the tree and logs in the foreground, while the distant trees are put in as flat tones — only their ragged edges suggest their texture.

Arbitrary, invented textures add interest and excitement to every area of this abstract treatment of the landscape. Paint is laid on thickly with a knife on some parts of the varied foreground; on other areas it has been brushed on thinly. In the sky, tones of light and dark are lightly scumbled over contrasting backgrounds. Although the shapes and textures seem arbitrary, the basic characteristics of objects are not lost.

Stevan Dohanos

Courtesy Vintage Books

Ben Shahn



fletcher martin

Five artists draw an eagle

In these pictures we are very much aware of the highly personal way each artist interprets form and texture. Notice how carefully Stevan Dohanos investigates every interesting surface detail – the emphasis on bold, arresting pattern in Ben Shahn's bird – the directness and vigor of Fletcher Martin's painting – Doris Lee's strong concern with the design of each element – and the decorative textural effect in Michael Mitchell's line drawing. These contrasting approaches, each successful in its own way, demonstrate once more that the greatest asset of the artist is his individuality.

m. mitchell

Doris Lee

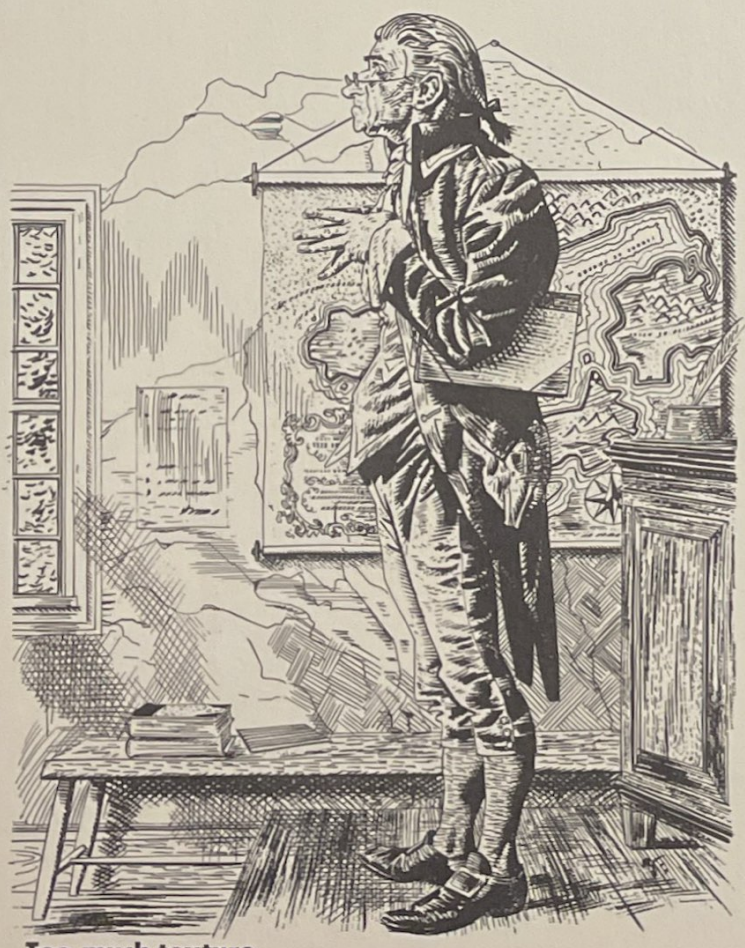
Keep your textures under control

In your pictures there should be a pleasing balance between areas of texture that are active and areas that are quiet. If all the forms in a picture are heavily textured – if there are no areas of relief, no resting points – every texture competes for attention and the picture looks overworked. It is clear to any viewer that the artist failed to keep the over-all effect in mind as he worked.

The opposite error – a poverty of textures – creates a weak, washed-out, monotonous effect. In addition to this, the forms or the materials they are made of may be hard to identify.

If your picture subject has a great number of forms and you feel that rendering all their textures would be confusing, remember that you can simplify and suggest texture without drawing or painting every detail. Show enough texture to produce an interesting variety in the picture, but don't overdo it.

To avoid a weak or overworked effect, plan the various textures and decide where they will go, before you start drawing. Make sure each texture relates appropriately to the others. A little forethought and planning like this can help you be sure your picture will have just the amount of texture it needs.



Too much texture

Not enough texture

FAMOUS ARTISTS COURSE
Student work
Lesson 9
Creating variety in forms, textures, and surfaces

HOW TO PRACTICE AND PREPARE FOR THIS LESSON

Lesson 9 shows how you can use textures, patterns and variety of form to enrich your pictures -- make them more interesting and convincing. Remember, though, that these things are essentially refinements. They can add much to sound drawing and composition, but can never be truly effective without these two basic ingredients of good picture making.

Before you begin your assignments for this lesson, you should spend as much time as you can doing the following practice work:

1. While studying this lesson, carefully observe the rich variety of forms and textures that surround you in your home or that you encounter in your daily life. Observe the character of everything -- cloth, metal, stone, wood, grass, earth, trees. As you study them, visualize what sort of lines or strokes of the pencil, pen, or brush you would use to create the illusion of these forms and textures. In effect, imagine yourself drawing or painting these things as you study them.

2. Next, to gain confidence in handling these various textures, do some experiments like those on pages 14 and 15. Play around with pencil, ink, wash and opaque and discover the many different textural effects you can create with each one. Then put your observations and experiments together by making drawings of textures that are close at hand, such as those of the pail and rocks on page 7. Do other drawings that show the effect of distance on textures (pages 8, 10 and 11).

3. You will also find it worthwhile to make drawings like those on pages 12 and 13, where both pattern and surface texture contribute interest. Select your own subjects, but follow the points made in the examples on these pages.

4. Don't limit yourself to working with realistic textures. Round out your practice for this lesson by drawing some pictures in which interesting textures and patterns are treated freely and creatively as in the examples on pages 25 and 26.

5. The subject of this lesson is ideally suited to the use of your sketchbook. Carry it with you and fill it with sketches that reveal how carefully you observe the forms, surfaces, and textures of the things around you.

THE ASSIGNMENTS YOU ARE TO SEND IN FOR CRITICISM

ASSIGNMENT 1. Using the photo on Plate 1 as reference, make a picture that will show us your ability to handle texture effectively. You may use a realistic approach in which the various surfaces or materials provide the textural interest -- or you may emphasize the design or decorative possibilities as shown on pages 12, 13, 25 and 26. Whichever way you choose to work, try to interpret such materials as cloth, hair, flesh, wood, etc., in distinctive and interesting ways. Remember, you may omit, rearrange, or add to what you see in the reference photo.

Your picture may be either vertical or horizontal. Don't make it larger than 9 x 12 inches. Do it on an 11 x 14-inch illustration board, using any medium covered in the lessons thus far.

Mark this drawing -- ASSIGNMENT 1.

ASSIGNMENT 2. Using the photo on Plate 2 as reference, make an opaque or wash drawing not more than 9 x 12 inches on an 11 x 14-inch illustration board. To this scene, add a figure wherever you wish. Be sure it is in correct scale and composes well within the picture. The reference photo contains many obvious textures -- don't hesitate to subdue some or accentuate others to create variety and interest in the over-all composition.

Mark this drawing -- ASSIGNMENT 2.

Your work will be judged chiefly on the following points:

- --How well you handle and interpret individual textures.
- --How skillfully you combine various textures -- emphasize some and subdue others to create interest without confusion.
- --How well you preserve the feeling of solid form and sound drawing beneath the surface of the textures and patterns in your picture.

(over, please)

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before mailing

IMPORTANT: Be sure to letter your name, address, and student number neatly at the lower left-hand corner of each assignment. In the lower right corner, place the lesson number and assignment number.

Your lesson carton should contain:

Assignment 1
Assignment 2
1 Return shipping label filled out completely

Mail this carton to:
FAMOUS ARTISTS COURSE, WESTPORT, CONN.